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First Distracted Driving Month Campaign Called a Success

Millions Made Aware of Dangers

(Sacramento, CA) – The nation's first and most ambitious statewide campaign against distracted driving was deemed a success at the close of the monthlong Distracted Driving Awareness Month in April. Officials of the California Office of Traffic Safety (OTS) and California Highway Patrol (CHP) praised the cooperation of hundreds of state and local agencies and the reaction of the public to the campaign, which combined the resources of 103 CHP offices throughout the state with over 280 local law enforcement agencies for special "zero tolerance" enforcements during the month.

In addition to the enforcement efforts, the CHP and OTS began the "It's Not Worth It!" public awareness campaign with TV and radio commercials, the Caltrans changeable message signs over highways, billboards, internet and social media and other outreach. The campaign is the largest and most broad-based campaign in the nation aimed at saving lives by convincing drivers to not text or talk on cell phones. The efforts did not stop at the end of April, but will continue as long as distracted driving is a traffic safety problem affecting the lives and futures of those on the road.

With over 80 percent of agencies reporting, officers issued 52,664 citations to drivers for either handheld use of their cell phone or text messaging during April. At the same time, preliminary statistics from the Statewide Integrated Traffic Records System indicate the number of fatal collisions is down 7 percent when comparing April 2010 to April 2011. While it's too soon to say whether or not this reduction is directly related to the distracted driving campaign, it's a step in the right direction.

"The dangerous use of cell phones while driving exploded on the scene in recent years," said OTS Director Christopher J. Murphy. "California has recognized this threat to safety and has committed to hit it head on. The April campaign was just the start, but a very impressive one."

"This campaign was not about seeing how many citations could be issued; law enforcement's motivation was to change driver behavior and reduce the number of collisions associated with distracted driving," said CHP Commissioner Joe Farrow. "Similar to 1993 when California implemented a primary enforcement law and officers could stop a vehicle just to cite a seat belt violation; people had to get in the habit of wearing a seat belt. Now they need to get into the practice of putting down the cell phone and driving."

(more)

Last month OTS released the results of the nation's first statewide cell phone observational survey that showed nine percent of drivers were talking or texting while driving, representing hundreds of thousands of drivers at any given time. Officials consider the results to be the low-end of the numbers of those talking or texting, especially in light of last summer's Traffic Safety Survey which showed up to 30 percent admit to talking or texting regularly.

The "It's Not Worth It!" campaign will continue with both enforcement and public awareness efforts. The State's Strategic Highway Safety Plan is developing tactics to combat distracted driving, such as formulating plans to increase the data and research available to more accurately understand and combat the problem. With the lives of hundreds of Californians at stake, the message will continue to be that any phone call or text message can wait until you reach a safe place to stop.

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